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ABSTRACT

This study reviews research examining the incidence of incest and child sexual abuse, focusing on the apparent discrepancy between incidence rates based on child service agency incident reports and the surveys of victims reports. Research is reviewed from the 1950s, 1970s, and 1980s. Research problems and limitations are described. The problem with varying definitions of incest and sexual abuse is discussed. Age-related reasons for underreporting of abuse are discussed, noting that younger children do not understand the notion of aberrant sexuality or its consequences. Positive and negative consequences of child sexual abuse reported in the literature are reviewed. Recent literature focusing on the initial or proximate effects of incest and sexual child abuse is described. The literature review presents these conclusions: (1) the seriousness of the problem of incest and sexual abuse is difficult to determine because of the discrepancy between official reports or incidence versus what has been found in recent victimization survey studies; (2) much of the discrepancy is due to lack of a standardized definition of sexual abuse; (3) there is an unknown degree of underreporting of sexual abuse made to child service agencies. (Author/ABL)

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INCEST AND SEXUAL ABUSE:
HOW SERIOUS IS THE PROBLEM?

A Doctoral Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

by

Stephanie Jefferson

May 1990

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HOW SERIOUS IS THE PROBLEM?

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ABSTRACT

INCEST AND SEXUAL ABUSE:
HOW SERIOUS IS THE PROBLEM?

by

Stephanie Jefferson

The seriousness of the problem of incest and sexual abuse is difficult to determine because of the discrepancy between the official reports of incidence versus what has been found in recent victimization survey studies. Much of the discrepancy is due to the lack of a standardized definition of sexual abuse. For example, Federal law excludes non-parents and non-caretakers as abusers by their definition of sexual abuse. It is further limited by an unknown degree of underreporting of such abuse made to child service agencies.

Incest and Sexual Abuse:
How Serious is the Problem?

Introduction

A growing concern for the safety of our children has been a major focus in the news media in recent years. Of late this concern has been focused in the area of sexual abuse of children. In the recent past, the horrifying disclosures brought to light in the McMartin case of child molestation have caused parents to take a closer look at the environment in which their children are placed.

Unfortunately, many of the myths about possible abusers lead to erroneous assumptions regarding the identifying characteristics of these abusers. Many people still believe that all abusers are "perverts," or "dirty old men." It is also believed that one can discern a child abuser simply by the way a person looks. It is regrettable that films assist in the propagation of such myths. These are not accurate portraits of those most likely to be responsible for the sexual abuse of children (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1981). Often in cases of incest and sexual abuse, the perpetrator and the child are members of the same immediate family (parent, step-parent, or sibling), a more distant relative (aunt, uncle, or cousin), or someone with whom the victim is already acquainted (neighbor or friend of the family) (Sarafino, 1979; Russell, 1983; Russell, 1984).

In spite of this fact, there appears to be propagation of the belief that most cases of sexual abuse are at the hands of strangers. These are the cases that get the most publicity from the news media. It is because of this focus of attention on strangers, that the abuse that takes place within the child's own environment frequently goes unnoticed.

This myth of the abusing stranger may be a factor in the low incidence of reported incest and sexual abuse. There are many factors that must be considered when looking at these figures. What appears to be a factor in the decision to report sexual abuse is the nature of the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and his or her family. Unfortunately, the decision not to report the incidence of sexual abuse is made because the perpetrator is a family member or a trusted family friend.

There is also the problem of a legal definition that must be taken into account. In many cases the definition of abuse influences the type of report made and in some cases it influences whether a report is made at all. Whatever the reason, there appears to be a great discrepancy between incidence rates based on child service agency incident reports versus the surveys of victim reports.

Methodology

A large portion of the literature reviewed that pertains to the discrepancy between the number of official reports of child sexual abuse cases and the number of child sexual abuse cases found in the literature is heavily dependent upon self-report. Self-report measures and inventories are subject to the biases of those surveyed, rely on the recall of past events of those surveyed, and are susceptible to the possibilities of exaggeration of those surveyed. While this may be problematic, it is important to note, particularly in the case of child sexual abuse, that there is no other method of obtaining this information.

Researchers conducting studies of child abuse often use demographic information made available by the census in an attempt to ensure the representativeness of sampling. An example of this is the study from the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1981) in which they used reported cases taken from the records of reporting agencies of four counties in the United States that were considered to be largely representative of the general population of the country. This selection was made utilizing their most recent census.

While this information may be representative of the reports made in the United States, it is not a reliable figure of actual incidence or prevalence in that victimization studies have shown that only a small percentage of child sexual abuse cases are ever reported.

Sarafino (1979) utilized cases reported to the police and child welfare associations in Brooklyn, Minneapolis, Connecticut, and Washington, D. C. While these cities may or may not be representative of the general population, it is important to note that this information can only be accurate regarding reports made to agencies.

The remainder of the studies utilized the method of self report to varying degrees. While self reports often are distorted or biased, the nature of the topic constrained the researchers to this method.

Kercher and McShane (1984) used a systematic random sample of 2000 names drawn from a list of persons holding valid driver licenses in the state of Texas. Of these 2000 names, 1056 surveys were obtained. Of these 53% were females and 44% were males, which is roughly representative of the population of the state of Texas. However, it is not representative of that population on other demographics (e.g., age, race, socioeconomic level). Most importantly, although this study only tapped into that portion of the population of Texas that holds a valid driver's license, it can be considered to be fairly representative of its adult population. What should be noted here is that, given the representativeness of the sample, it is significant that it projects figures greater than those reported by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.

Finkelhor (1984) utilized a college population for his sample. It was comprised of 790 undergraduate men and women. It could be stated that his results may only be a reflection of the incidence of child sexual abuse for those in a college setting and may not be generalizable to the national population. However, when taken into consideration that those attending college represent a substantial cross-section of young adults in the United States, and given that this population tends to represent the middle-class in large part, it is

interesting that reports rarely come to the attention of reporting agencies from this socio-economic group. What tends to appear in the reports from these agencies are incidents that occur in lower socio-economic groups.

Russell's (1983) sample of 930 women was taken from the population of San Francisco. They were representative of the 1980 census data for the city of San Francisco with respect to age, marital status, and ethnicity. While those selected were representative of the population, it is unclear how this was affected by the attrition rate of 50% of the subjects. A strength of this study is that the data were collected by intensively trained interviewers, but there is no mention of inter-rater reliability. It would have been interesting to see what effect there would have been had Russell included men in her sample.

While San Francisco was selected because it was believed that the women in this city would be more willing and honest in their reports than other parts of the nation, this may limit the generality of the study in that these "cultural differences" may in some way affect their findings. Their utilization of interviewers may have in some way affected the responses obtained by them which would directly affect the results of this study.

All of the studies mentioned thus far have utilized the survey method of collecting data. While the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1981) and Sarafino (1979) used data from legal documents, the results would appear to be reliable with the exception of unreported cases. The remainder of the studies relied upon the recall of the respondent of events from the past. The question here is the accuracy of these accounts.

Rosenfeld (1979) utilized a very small sample. It would also be difficult to call this sample representative of the general population in that he only included hospitalized patients in his study. As he was the only person gathering data for this study, without a reliability check the possibility of interviewer bias. However, the point he is attempting to make is

that a more careful method of history taking will make available data for a more accurate accounting of the incidence and prevalence of sexual child abuse.

Although the study by Gruber and Jones (1983) utilized a small sample, a control group was employed in order to obtain a better understanding of the effects of the abuse. The generality of this study is limited as the population consisted of white males from a middle- and lower middle-class rural area.

Problem with Definitions

While there is a national definition of incest and of sexual abuse, no standard definition is used by all states. Although Federal law requires that each state have a law regarding these areas of abuse, it is not required that they be uniform, but merely that they follow the basic "intent" of the Federal law. The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1981) stated that the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 was amended to define child abuse, which includes sexual abuse or exploitation, in terms of injury or maltreatment of the child "by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare." The amended Subsection 5(3) of this Act extends the term "sexual abuse" to include

the obscene or pornographic photographing, filming or depiction of children for commercial purposes, or the rape, molestation, incest, prostitution or other such forms of sexual exploitation of children under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby. (p. 1)

In order for each state to be eligible for State grants under the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, definitions in State child abuse laws must be consistent with the Federal Act and must be in accordance with regulation set forth by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. While this sets guidelines for what constitutes child sexual abuse for each state, it allows for jurisdictional interpretation. The discrepancy in these definitions affects the attitudes of those reporting the incidence, as well as the prevalence, of incest and sexual abuse. Because there is no standardized definition of

incest and sexual abuse, it is not surprising that there is little consensus in the manner in which each of the authors of the studies to be discussed defined incest and sexual abuse.

The authors of the following research studies have formulated definitions of child sexual abuse that were more appropriate for their area of study. These definitions often were more inclusive than the definition in the federal guidelines. The most explicit definition of incest or child sexual abuse comes from Diana Russell's studies in this area.

Russell (1983) defined child sexual abuse by categorizing it into two very distinct classifications, extrafamilial child sexual abuse and intrafamilial child sexual abuse. She defined extrafamilial child sexual abuse "as one or more unwanted sexual experiences with persons unrelated by blood or marriage, ranging from petting to rape, before the victim turned 14 years, and completed or attempted forcible rape experiences from the ages of 14 to 17 years (inclusive)." Her definition of intrafamilial child sexual abuse is "any kind of exploitive sexual contact that occurred between relatives, no matter how distant the relationship, before the victim turned 18 years old." Experiences involving wanted sexual contact either with a relative or with a peer were regarded as nonexploitive, e.g., sex play between cousins or siblings of approximately the same age.

What is different from the federal guidelines regarding the definition used by Russell is that there is a much broader definition of sexual abuse of the intrafamilial type. The federal guidelines only include parent and non-parent caretakers. Russell included other family members who may not be perceived to be in a position of power or influence by those outside the family, but do in fact have power or influence over the child. This allowance is because of the potential for trauma from such sexual contact and the abuse of power in such relationships (Russell, 1983).

An important consideration is how the general public defines incest and child sexual abuse. This definition is based on nine variables: the age of the victim, the age of the perpetrator, the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, the sex of the victim,

the sex of the perpetrator, the sexual act itself, issues of consent, a consideration of the possible consequences, and the sex of the respondent (person making the report). From this information regarding the manner in which the general public defines what is and what is not considered to be an abusive situation or act, it is not difficult to understand the discrepancies between the number of official incidence reports and the number of child sexual abuse cases reported in the other literature.

Incidence of Sexual Abuse

Discrepancy in Reporting

Weinberg (1955) reported that in 1910 the estimated incidence of sexual abuse was 1.2 cases per million children. He estimated the incidence to be 1.9 cases per million in 1920 and he estimated there to be 1.1 cases per million in 1930. Each of these figures reports less than .0002% incidence in the child population for each year reported. Were there truly so few incidents of sexual abuse in our society? Is this the case today? In an effort to gain an understanding of the extent to which this problem is present in our society currently, there have been two approaches to studying the incidence of incest and child sexual abuse. One approach is to collect data from actual reports made to agencies such as Child Protective Services. The advantage of this approach is that data collected from reporting agencies is both reliable and verifiable. The disadvantage is that all cases of child sexual abuse are not reported.

The other approach is to determine how widespread this type of victimization is in the general population. This differs from reports made to child protective agencies in that official reports typically report annual rates, whereas victimization reports entail child-adult sexual contact in a lifetime. In this approach one focuses on the abuse that took place in the past. One of the advantages of this approach is that victimization surveys make possible the collection of information that may not have been made available to reporting agencies.

The disadvantage of this type of approach is that it relies almost totally on the recall of those participating in the survey.

In 1979 the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect reported 44,700 cases of child sexual abuse per year. However, in 1981 they estimated the incidence to be over 100,000 cases per year (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1981), which is .16% of the child population. The accuracy of their findings is greatly suspect. The suspicion is due in part to their strict and narrow definition of child sexual abuse, which is limited to that act perpetrated by a parent or child caretaker, physical/genital contact, as well as underreporting.

Sarafino (1979) collected official data on both intrafamilial and extrafamilial reported cases of child sexual abuse. Based on a combined rate of 122.5 cases per 100,000 children, he estimated a nationwide incidence rate of 74,725 reported sexual abuse cases in a one-year period. Using these data, Sarafino further extrapolated these data to include an average estimate of unreported cases of sexual child abuse to obtain a nationwide figure of 336,200 cases of sexual abuse per year, which translates to .58% of the child population. Sarafino obtained the first number by utilizing the strict definition of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. He did not state the method he used to obtain the second extrapolated estimate.

Using the survey approach, Kercher and McShane (1984) estimated a figure of 808,217 to 834,501 adult victims of sexual child abuse in their lifetime in the state of Texas. In terms of the general population, this translates to a rate of 3% for males and 12% for females. The definition of sexual abuse utilized in this study was limited to physical contact (e.g., fondling, kissing, genital contact, etc.).

From a 1981 survey in Boston, 6% of the males and 15% of the females had had an experience of sexual abuse before the age of 16 years by a person at least five years older (Finkelhor, 1984). Finkelhor utilized a broader definition of child sexual abuse which

included sexual physical contact of any kind, inappropriate sexual solicitation, and encounters with exhibitionists.

Russell (1983) reported that 38% of the women in her study had had at least one experience of sexual abuse before the age of 18 years and 28% had had at least one experience of sexual abuse before the age of 14 years. What is interesting is that this percentage was obtained using the strict definition utilized by the National Center on Child Abuse. However, when Russell applied the broader definition of child sexual abuse, which includes unwanted non-contact sexual experiences and experiences with exhibitionists, the percentages rise to an alarming 54%, with 48% of these experiences taking place prior to the age of 14 years. It was reported that only 2% of the intrafamilial cases had been reported to the police or other service agency and 6% of the extrafamilial cases had been reported.

Russell may have reported such high rates of incidence because she included in her definition sexual contact with relatives other than care-takers such as uncles, cousins, etc. Another reason that her incidence rates appear significantly high when compared to other studies, such as done by Finkelhor (1984), is that of the population sampled. Finkelhor's (1984) sample was from a college population. These students tended to come from middle-class society, a socio-economic group from which underreporting is problematic as noted previously. Another possibility is that Russell (1983) utilized females as interviewers, to whom victimized women may be more willing to disclose about the occurrence of sexual abuse.

To understand the true magnitude of the problem of child sexual abuse, one is faced with major discrepancies when comparing these two types of data. While the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1981) reported an estimate in excess of 100,000 cases per year, Sarafino (1979) reported an estimate of 336,200 cases per year. However, Kercher and McShane (1984) reported more than twice this figure for the state of Texas

alone. Their nationwide percentage estimates of 12% are modest when compared with the 38% and 54% from the Russell (1983) study.

There are a number of reasons that could account for the discrepancy between incidence rates from official data versus survey data. There is great reluctance on the part of the parents and family to report incidents of sexual abuse. A few of these reasons are fear of social censure, shame, an unwillingness to subject the child and/or the parents to embarrassing questioning (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1981).

James, Womach, and Strauss (1978) have documented that private physicians often advise that reporting would be harmful to the family while expressing dissatisfaction with social agencies' approach to these cases. Only one-third of the physicians surveyed indicated that they urged the family of sexual abuse victims to report the incident.

In summary, there is a substantial discrepancy between the officially reported incidence of child sexual abuse and those figures obtain by various surveys. This discrepancy is particularly problematic when a comparison of nationwide percentage estimates is made. However, simply noting the discrepancy is not sufficient; an understanding of how such a discrepancy came to be is needed. There is also a discrepancy concerning the age at which sexual victimization is most likely to occur. The official reports have indicated a greater number of incidents reported for children under 10 years of age, whereas the victimization surveys have reported a greater incidence of sexual victimization between the ages of 10 and 14 years. Why is there this discrepancy?

Age-Related Reasons for Underreporting

In the case of younger children, particularly ages 1 to 9 years, their cognitive development may be such that they would not understand the notion of aberrant sexuality or its consequences. Also younger children may be more easily pressured into secrecy. The younger child may also feel the need for the caring contact that is associated with an

adult despite this activity. More commonly, the younger child is likely to see the perpetrator as an authority figure and may perceive the sexual activity as an extension of this authority (De Jong, Hervada & Emmett, 1983). These reasons make it unlikely that the child will report the incident.

It has been found that the greatest number of incidents of child sexual abuse occur during the pre-adolescent years, from 10 to 14 years, according to victimization surveys. However, the incidents that are most likely to be reported are those that involve younger children. While this group probably does not account for all of the missing numbers in the official reports, there is a greater likelihood that this group would have more underreported cases than younger age groups.

De Jong et al. (1983) stated that the reason these cases go unreported may be attributed to the particular point of the adolescent's moral development; this would apply to the pre-adolescent as well. At this time adolescents have an increased sense of right and wrong. Although they may be aware that sexual contact is inappropriate, they may view themselves as responsible for the sexual contact.

Contributing to this sense of responsibility is the adolescent's development of a more independent cognitive concept of sexuality. The effect of this is that adolescents are aware of their own sexuality and are able to differentiate their own sexual stimulation from that of the perpetrator. This coupled with their egocentrism may account for their feeling of responsibility for the incident and thereby decrease the likelihood of their reporting the incident.

For each age group there appears to be particular developmental reasons for the, underreporting of child sexual abuse. Younger children are not cognitively able to discriminate between the appropriateness or inappropriateness of adult behavior and therefore may not be able to report this activity to someone else. Although pre-adolescents and adolescents are able to make this discrimination, they are often unclear about their role

in this behavior and take as their own the responsibility for the adult's aberrant behavior. Because adolescents have taken on this responsibility, they tend to be more reluctant to report the abuse. Regardless of the reason for the underreporting or the age of the child, child sexual abuse is a problem that has serious consequences for the victim.

Consequences of Child Sexual Abuse

There has been much presented in the literature concerning the "long-term" effects of incest and child sexual abuse, and the majority of these studies are done in the form of self-report from an historical perspective. However, because these studies involve adults there is the assumption that the effects of incest and sexual child abuse are not made evident until adulthood. This belief often diminishes the urgency with which this most serious problem needs to be addressed.

There are even those who believe that incest and child sexual abuse not only has no harmful effects, but in some instances may be beneficial to the child. Ramey (1979) went so far as to say that our inhibitions surrounding incest lead to a "withdrawal of touch" from our children and that this is detrimental to our children. Ramey has declared society's present attitude toward incest and our prohibitions surrounding it "inhumane" and has implied this as the reason for adolescent promiscuity. He stated,

Children, especially girls, feel the lack very keenly, because it comes at a time when they are also being told in many ways that they have become 'unclean' through no fault of their own. The withdrawal of touching confirms the message. Who knows how much psychic damage we cause our children with such well meant yet inhumane attitudes? Who knows whether one result [of bending over backwards to avoid any possibility of incestuous involvement may not be the present rash of feverish adolescent sexual activity with its undesirable results? How many adolescent girls have not said, 'it's the only time I feel someone really loves me?' (p. 12)

At first glance one may tend to lend some credence to Ramey's position. However, he included caressing and genital fondling as types of touching to be recommended.

Positive Consequences

Ramey is not alone in this view. There are those who see sex as something that is missing from our children's lives. Constantine and Martinson (1981) posited that children are "as fully sexual beings as adults." They also maintained that sexuality and sexual experiences are just as important for children as they are for adults. They maintained that sex belongs in the child's present and not only the child's future.

Joan Nelson, who holds a M.A. degree in psychology and is also a victim of incest, stated that her own experience was not only caring and beneficial, but recalled this period as "perhaps the happiest period of her life" (Constantine & Martinson, 1981). She stated that what was negative was the response she received when she disclosed the occurrence of the incestuous relationship and that it was then that she felt she was involved in something "bad."

Nelson attributed these "bad" feelings to the disclosure of the incest and not the incest itself, which she viewed as positive. This prompted Nelson (1981) to study the forms of incestuous behavior, "from coercive, abusive incest to consensual intrafamilial sexual experiences and to examine the attitudes toward incest as reported by the participants."

Of the 100 individuals surveyed, Nelson (1981) found that 39% described the incest experience in negative terms, 53% described the incest experience in positive terms, and 8% of the experiences were incapable of evaluation by either the subjects or the evaluation team.

This study is problematic in several areas. The sample used was not representative. Those participating in the study were selected by responding to various ads placed in newspapers and magazines whose circulation appears to be limited to the San Francisco area, with the exception of the New York Times and Psychology Today. There was no inter-rater reliability check of the evaluators of the questionnaires.

The greatest problem with this study is that the findings are suspect. Because of Nelson's position of incest being a positive experience and because of this view there are no victims or perpetrators, she included perpetrators as well as victims of incest in her survey. What her findings showed was that males found this experience to be more positive than females; as did the older partner who found this to be a more positive experience than the younger partner. Finkelhor and Hotaling (1984) and Russell (1983) have found that the perpetrators of sexual child abuse are predominately male and a minimum of 5 to 7 years older than their child victim. Because of the manner in which the findings are presented, one is left to wonder if the perpetrators are the ones who most often find the experience to be positive, whereas as the victims are more likely to report the experience as negative.

While there are those who would agree with Nelson in stating that incest and child-adult sexual contact is viewed as a positive experience, there are others who will not go this far. Although they are not willing to take the position that child-adult sexual contact is a positive experience, they are not willing either to relegate this contact to the negative.

Tsai, Feldman-Summers, and Edgar (1979) held this neutral position. In their study of 90 women, they utilized comparison groups to determine the effects of incest and child sexual abuse. The groups were designated as clinical, consisting of women currently seeking therapy for problems associated with child molestation; nonclinical, women who had been molested, but who had never sought therapy; and control, women who had not been molested nor had they sought therapy.

For the clinical versus the nonclinical group comparisons the variables examined were molestation incidents, age at last molestation incident, duration and frequency of molestation, types of sexual acts performed and feelings at the time and ultimate impact. For the clinical, nonclinical and control group comparisons, the variables of interest were prepubescent sexual activities, frequency of orgasms, number of sexual partners, sexual

responsiveness to current partner, satisfaction with sexual relations, and quality of close relationships with males.

What was found was that there were more significant differences between the clinical and nonclinical groups than there were between the nonclinical and control groups. They also found that women in the nonclinical group suffered no ill effects of the molestation when compared to the control group, whereas this was not the case for the clinical group.

Tsai et al. (1979) stated as possible reasons for this difference in reaction that significantly greater proportion of clinical as opposed to nonclinical women were molested at the age of 12 years or later. Their reasoning is that as children get older they are more likely to accept greater responsibility for the molestation than are younger children, they are likely to be more aware of social norms than are younger children, and/or the molestation may be linked with the turmoil and struggles of puberty. In this way, for Tsai et al., the trauma is more likely to be attributable to factors other than the molestation itself.

What is most problematic with this study is the manner in which Tsai et al. subdivided the group of sexually victimized women. A more appropriate comparison would be that of all of the sexually victimized women with a group of women who were not sexually victimized. This would give a more accurate picture of the effect of the abuse. There are also problems of the representativeness of the sample and inter-rater reliability. Since the women in this study were recruited through television advertisements there is considerable likelihood that they did not constitute a representative sample.

Although these studies reported in their findings that the effects of child-adult sexual contact were negligible, or possibly even positive, it is important to bear in mind that these studies had significant problems in their design which render these findings questionable. The majority of the literature available on the effects of child-adult sexual contact have reported negative consequences of such contact. In spite of the preponderance of literature

that attests to the negative consequences of child-adult sexual contact, there are those who maintain a more positive view of this contact.

Negative Consequences

DeMott (1980) has named those who hold to the positive view of child-adult sexual contact as the "pro-incest lobby." In his article published in the March, 1980 issue of Psychology Today, DeMott discussed consensual contact between the adult and the child as the main argument from the pro-incest lobby. Their argument, as DeMott presented it, relies on the term consensual. The position of the pro-incest lobby is that, provided the child-adult sexual contact takes place within the confines of a loving, trusting relationship, the child will experience this contact positively, which this groups considers to be "positive incest."

DeMott (1980), Russell (1983), Finkelhor & Hotaling (1984), and many others have strongly disagreed with this position. Their position is that it is precisely because incest and child sexual abuse occur within what the child understands to be a loving, trusting relationship that the injury occurs. It is this betrayal by the trusted adult that is correlated highly with the extent of injury felt by the victim.

Demott further argued against the position of the pro-incest lobby with respect to the term consensual, because a child is unable to give consent to an adult. I must agree with him in that consent cannot be given by a child. The reason for this is that children view adults as authority figures and therefore must comply with their wishes. Young children in particular are not able to distinguish between the selfless love and selfish desire of the adult with whom they are involved (DeMott, 1980). It is because of this innocence/ignorance that they are susceptible to the manipulation of the adult.

Given the recent attempt of the pro-incest lobby to diminish society's negative attitude toward incest, it must be understood that this is by no means the only trend of thought in the current literature regarding incest and sexual child abuse. The research on outcome

effects of incest and sexual abuse is widely divergent. There are a few studies that support the position of the "pro-incest lobby" concluding that there are beneficial effects of child-adult sexual contact and that society's taboos are harmful (Ramey, 1979; Nelson, 1981, Constantine & Martinson, 1981). There are those who hold the more moderate position that state the effects of incest and sexual child abuse can be negligible to neutral (Tsai et al., 1979). Still another camp reports that incest and child sexual abuse is undoubtedly harmful (Finkelhor, 1979; Russell, 1983).

Much of that literature that presents incest and child sexual abuse as harmful primarily focus on the effects in adulthood (Russell, 1983). The fact that child sexual abuse is so widespread is particularly appalling because of the negative consequences it has throughout one's lifetime. The most frequently described problems are sexual dysfunction, poor self-esteem, self-destructive drug and/or alcohol abuse, anxiety, somatic complaints, learning difficulties and marital difficulties. Gelinas (1983) reported that the more persistent of the negative effects of incest is chronic traumatic neurosis. She reported that incestuous abuse constitutes a major trauma with its predominant reported effect being fear. Browne and Finkelhor's (1986) findings were similar, but also included deficits in social functioning. Seymour (1987) found that the earlier the onset of the abuse, the greater the duration of abuse tends to be. This would greatly magnify the corrosive effects on self-esteem (Finkelhor, 1984).

When considering the destructiveness of child sexual abuse, it is of great import to understand that there is an appreciable amount of evidence that this type of victimization may force children out of their families at a much earlier age in an effort to escape the abuse. Some of these children use marriage as a means of escape. Often these marriages are exploitive and abusive, but because they have no family to return to, they will remain in the relationship as victims and again are dependent upon the perpetrator. Those who do not marry often find themselves living in dire circumstances, most often because of a lack of

education and poor employment opportunities. Their circumstances place them in an environment that is not likely to be a protected one, again leaving themselves at great risk for further victimization (Finkelhor, 1984).

Further, the literature is beginning to present studies that focus on the initial or proximate effects of incest and sexual child abuse. These effects are being exhibited in these children's behavior. Friedrich, Urquiza and Beilke (1986) found that victims of incest and sexual abuse are more likely to act out behaviorally. The Child Behavior Checklist was administered to the mother or mother-figure of 85 sexually abused children who were within the appropriate or reasonable age range for the instrument. What was found was that 35% of the males and 46% of the females had significantly elevated scores on the internalizing scale, and 36% of the males and 39% of the females had significantly elevated scores on the externalizing scale. Since only 2% of the general population has scores as elevated as these, this is clearly an example of the harmfulness of child sexual abuse.

Another important finding was that the more invasive the sexual act and the greater the frequency and duration of the abuse, particularly by someone who was emotionally close to the child, the greater the severity and variety of behavior problems.

Lindberg and Distad (1985) referred to this acting out behavior as a survival response to the abusive situation. In their study of 27 adolescents the overt behavior they found was that of running away, alcohol and/or drug abuse, explosive anger, suicide attempts, self-mutilation, seductiveness and/or promiscuity. They considered these behaviors to be appropriate survival responses and necessary for adolescent.

Although the sample included only those children from a children's home in Wyoming, these behaviors are not exclusive to this population. These behaviors were exhibited in Cavaiola and Schiff's (1988) study comparing physically abused adolescents to sexually abused adolescents. Their behavioral findings in both groups were similar to the survival

responses seen by Lindberg and Distad (1985), and these behaviors were significantly different from their nonabused counterparts. However, there was a significant difference in that the physically abused adolescents were more likely to exhibit homicidal ideations whereas the sexually abused adolescents were more likely to exhibit suicidal ideation.

Adams-Tucker's (1983) findings were in line with these as well. However, her findings were exhibited in children aged 2 years to 15 years of age. In addition to the behaviors listed in the Lindberg and Distad (1985) study, these sexually abused children exhibited problems concerning school, sleep related complaints, oppositional difficulties with parents, siblings and peers, and anxiety.

Conclusion

It appears that the problem of incest and child sexual abuse is a significant one. However, because of a reluctance to report such incidents it is extremely difficult to get an accurate picture of the prevalence of this type of abuse. That which stands in the way of knowing the extent of the problem is the lack of a standardized definition of sexual abuse toward children as well as the problem of underreporting. Although the government has set forth guidelines in defining sexual abuse, the formalizing of definitions is a jurisdictional matter for each state. Also, the exclusion of non-parent/non-caretakers in the Federal requirements for sexual abuse severely reduces the number of reportable incidents.

There should also be a greater enforcement of reporting by professionals to whom such knowledge may come (e.g., physicians). Although their intentions in advising parents not to report incidents of sexual abuse may be well intentioned, the attention gained from reporting in many cases may be the only way in which the child will receive the necessary treatment to begin reparations of the devastation caused by the abuse. Mental health professionals should make inquiry into the possibility of child sexual abuse a standard part

of their initial interview process. Often the presenting problem may be a symptom of the history of abuse.

What is becoming apparent is that there is clear evidence for the harmful effects of incest and sexual child abuse. When comparing the evidence of the harmful effects of incest and sexual child abuse with the findings of the pro-incest lobby, it appears that there is greater empirical support for the position that child-adult sexual contact is harmful to the child.

Some of the reported lasting effects of sexual child abuse are sexual dysfunction, poor self-esteem, self-destructive drug and/or alcohol abuse, somatic complaints and anxiety. The proximate or initial effects that have been exhibited by child victims are significantly elevated scores on the internalizing and externalizing scales of the Child Behavior Checklist, running away, alcohol and/or drug abuse, explosive anger, suicide attempts, self-mutilation, seductiveness and/or promiscuity, school problems, and anxiety.

In light of the findings presented in this paper, incest and child sexual abuse is a serious problem that must be addressed. Given the pervasiveness of this problem, psychotherapy specifically designed to this area of need is a must. Further research must be done in the area of specific school related problems (i.e., learning disabilities, impulsivity, conduct disorder related behaviors, etc.) that might be caused by incest and child sexual abuse. Also, teachers and other school personnel that come in contact with children need to be alerted to the possible symptoms of incest and child sexual abuse, as well as encouragement to report their suspicions of possible incidents.

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